

It's Her Turn(Out): How Latinas Influence Political Participation in the Latinx Community

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Abstract: Latinas have been identified as unique political elites in American Latinx communities, but little is known about how this affects Latinx political participation. In this paper, I explore the role of Latinas as community organizers at the local level in order to evaluate if they are able to increase participatory politics in the form of voter registration over a time span of a decade, specifically the years of 2006-2016. This paper contributes to understanding of the Latinx community, and it also advances knowledge on how engaged members of certain communities can foster group consciousness among a multi-ethnic group. I begin by situating this lens in the context of current political participation knowledge and arguments about the Latinx community in general, as well as Latinas specifically. I then explain the theory and corresponding hypotheses to be tested, with the succeeding section detailing the methodology for doing so. The next section presents the results of the tests and corresponding geospatial data, including a discussion of the results and a positive relationship between Latina population and Latinx voter registration growth. Finally, I conclude with a brief summary of the results and recommendations for future scholarship on the subject.

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Introduction

In 2006, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 4437, a bill on border protection and undocumented immigration. This marked the first time in United States Congressional history that legislation dealing with undocumented immigration sparked a national discussion. H.R. 4437 received countrywide backlash; hence the Senate did not pass the bill. Throughout the nation, pro-immigrant marches led by Latinx activists exploded, with messages emphasizing no human being as illegal. A sense of linked-fate encouraged the pan-ethnic Latinx community to peacefully protest the legislation and acknowledge a common identity. More than ten years later, immigration laws continue to be a unifying force among the Latinx community. However, scholars have not evaluated how the community mobilizes when there is no nationally unifying legislation on the floor. At the municipal level in particular, political scientists know very little about the Latinx community and what forces drive political participation. In this paper, I explore the role of Latinas as community organizers at the local level in order to evaluate if they are able to increase participatory politics in the form of voter registration over a time span of a decade, specifically the years of 2006-2016. This paper contributes to understanding of the Latinx community, and it also advances knowledge on how engaged members of certain communities can foster group consciousness among a multi-ethnic group¹.

The following section situates this paper in the context of current political participation knowledge and arguments about the Latinx community in general, as well as Latinas specifically. The third section explains the theory and corresponding hypotheses to be tested, with the succeeding section detailing the methodology for doing so. Section four presents the results of the tests and corresponding geospatial data as well as a synthesis of the interviews, including a discussion of these results. Finally, I conclude with a brief summary of the results and recommendations for future scholarship on the subject.

Current Literature and Arguments

There is little consensus on what drives political participation and mobilization for Latinx folks, with some linking action to community value (Hardy-Fanta, 1995) and others considering the significance of an ethnic group-consciousness or national origin as a way to mobilize Latinx (DeSipio, 1996; Padilla, 1985) or interpersonal interactions (Michelson, 2005). Despite

¹ It is important to note that although this paper utilizes a gendered lens, the author recognizes the difference between sex, gender, and gender non-conformity and in no way is asserting the gender binary as compulsory. Rather, due to data limitations, the only substantive material available utilized the gender binary of male/female. Thus, the term “Latinx” is used to refer to the entire population; this term includes those within and outside of the gender binary.

demonstrations that ethnic group-consciousness may be crucial to understanding the Latinx community and mobilizing them to political participation, the question remains how this ethnic identity and sense of group-consciousness develop (Barreto et. al, 2004; DeFrancesco-Soto, 2004; Leighley, 2001; Sanchez, 2006; Shaw, de la Garza, & Lee, 2000; Stokes, 2003; Uhlaner, Cain, & Kiewiet, 1989). Those who claim their ethnic identity as salient are more likely to be registered to vote, especially regarding racial policy issues, and participate for other Latino causes (Masuoka, 2008). Accordingly, the Latinx community turns out at higher rates when there is a Latinx candidate running, with those rates increasing more so when that candidate has unlocked the Latinx identity of their potential voters (Benajmin, 2017, Hanjal and Lee, 2011). Outside of candidates, there have been more recent revelations in regards to the context of an election, claiming elite mobilization, relational goods, and the explicit racial and/or ethnic context of a campaign and its candidates can facilitate higher rates of Latinx turnout (Benjamin, 2017, Hanjal and Trounstine, 2005), as can “go vote” campaigns, particularly when delivered from Latinx folks (Michelson, 2005). That is, identity and interpersonal interactions emerge as a theme of mobilizing the Latinx community.

I am studying Latinas because they face a multitude of racial, gendered, and cultural barriers to political participation, yet are the fastest growing demographic in Congress. Based on the existing literature, an intersectional framework is essential to understanding the relationship between Latinas and Latinx political participation. An intersectional analysis allows consideration for all of the various identities that may or may not affect how Latinas operate, such as gender and race. While minority groups are less likely to have high rates of political participation and efficacy, this is most dramatic for the Latinx and Asian communities (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Without understanding why these rates are so low, the Latinx political participation rates cannot be improved, and instead, will likely become further alienated from the political process. This, in addition to the large body of scholarship pointing out the disadvantages women in politics have, makes the political orientation around Latinas even more vital.

Latinas, in particular, have been identified as quintessential vessels to activating an ethnic identity and group consciousness (Hardy-Fanta, 1995). Latinas are in a rare position, facing what is called the “triple bind” of oppression: racism, sexism, and harmful cultural norms. It may be this triple bind of oppression that creates the unique Latina political identity, centering around selfless community development and progress, behind the scenes work, and not often traditionally political (Hardy-Fanta, 1995 Pardo, 1998)-thus the use of an intersectional approach. At the local level, Latinas operate differently than Latinos in the political sphere, and as women of color they

operate differently than white women , some suggesting this conception of politics and community organizing being synonymous to a mindset unique to Latinas (Hardy-Fanta, 1995, Pardo, 1998). Latinas seem to participate in politics for their community, and similarly to other female political actors, they hold themselves accountable as responsible for the well being of their community (Dolan, 2016, Volden et. Al, 2013).

Just as the literature on what drives Latinx political participation is diverse, equally mixed is the scholarship on which local election design serves the community best, let alone Latinas. Latinas appear to be key leaders in the Latinx community as forementioned, making it important to consider which system best enables them to be as active and efficient as possible. Part of this confusion stems back to the triple bind: do Latinas fall into the scholarship that says women excel in certain contexts or the scholarship that says people of color excel in other contexts? There are some intersectional analyzes, which draw on literature that predicts minorities to benefit from single-member designs and women do better in at-large systems. Yet, the results have often been inconclusive or insignificant, sometimes showing electoral systems to affect black men and white women but not Latinx, then sometimes claiming Latinx electoral design benefits/disadvantages seems to vary by region, but that other times districts depress turnout (Hanjal et. al, 2011, Lee, 2008, Hanjal et. al, 2005).

Additionally, the current arguments discussing the most effective electoral system for African American representation at the local level almost always include a population threshold as the first step for any sort of mobilization, participation, and representation (Hanjal et. al, Lee, 2008). This threshold number is often around 10% of the voting body, and North Carolina's Latinx population is about 10% (U.S Census Bureau, 2017). While some counties have but a few Latinx folks, some double, triple, or quadruple that number. North Carolina's varying Latinx population with an average of the accepted threshold for African American political incorporation in combination with its ranking as ninth in the fastest-growing state Latino population (Pew Research Center, 2016) create a prime platform for observance and analysis.

Theory and hypotheses

My theory focuses on the role of Latinas as community organizers. Based on the relevant literature, their presence in a community appears to catalyze group consciousness among Latinx people, which should increase political participation, particularly in the form of voter registration. Scholars have theorized more concentrated ethnic populations as being correlated to higher levels of political participation, but the question for this exploration considers whether or not gender may be a factor in that relationship. In operating as community organizers who focus on

interpersonal connections and intimate interactions, Latinas seem to be in a position to unlock others' ethnic identity and then, in continuing in their activism, facilitate a sense of linked-fate that results in an ethnic group consciousness. Latinos tend to gravitate towards more center stage political roles instead of community organizing, such as running for office. That being said, it is important to question whether it is Latina's activism or activism in general that is linked to Latinx political participation. If Latinos are equally as involved in the community as Latinas, does the Latinx community feel equally inclined to participate? Beyond this, is it the activism of Latinas or their mere presence that is linked to Latinx political participation?

Thus, my theory aims to examine both the presence of Latinas via a population analysis and interviews with Latina activists. Now, after recognizing the how ethnic identity is linked to political participation, group consciousness often occurs as a result of realizing ethnic identity and leads to higher rates of political participation, such as voter registration, and the Latinx community is no exception. Essentially, Latinas may be a key element to unlocking the Latinx community's ethnic identity and overall group consciousness, whether it be due to their presence or activism. Ultimately, I predict that over the years of 2006-2016, if a county's Latinx population has demonstrated growth in Latina population, then there will be simultaneously increasing rates of Latinx voter registration.

While this theory is based upon Latinas being vital to Latinx political participation, it is important to consider the receptivity to participation from the chosen political venue, in this case- local elections. If there is an electoral design working against the community, how much does population and participation matter? Determining which electoral system the Latinx community is more receptive to and active within is the first step in discovering more about this increasingly influential community. The second step is determining why this is happening and regressions can only go so far. In order to really answer why Latinas may be linked to political participation and how activism is involved, I spoke to about ten Latinas in the state of North Carolina about their experiences as activists and community organizers.

My hypotheses are as follow:

H1: As the number of Latinas in a Latinx countywide population increases, then the Latinx countywide population of registered voters will increase in a decade-long time span.

H2: The number of Latinos in a Latinx countywide population should not affect the Latinx countywide population of registered voters over a decade.

H3: As the number of Latinas in a Latinx countywide population increase, then the Latinx countywide population of registered will increase as a result of the Latina increase.

H4: Single-member district systems are more likely than multi-member district systems to demonstrate a decade long positive relationship between the Latina population and the number of registered Latinx voters.

While these tests are intended to be helpful in providing more information about the Latinx community, it is crucial to include a more in-depth element as well: the interviews. Political Scientists have struggled to gain concrete knowledge on the Latinx community due to language barriers, misunderstanding cultural values, and pan ethnicity, to name a few. Thus, while statistical models are informative and telling, an interview dimension to this project is vital to gain a more holistic understanding of the Latinx community and Latinas role in political participation. As mentioned, interviews, collected from key Latina community organizers throughout North Carolina, will give a direct voice to the Latinx community and provide an opportunity for a deeper analysis of the results.

Interviews, in addition to a quantitative analysis, can provide a meaningful perspective to understanding and interpreting the significance of the data. Interpersonal interactions help answer the why and how of results, which is particularly vital in terms of the Latinx community within political science. Language and cultural differences can complicate attempts to examine various facets of the Latinx's community motivation for political participation. Furthermore, interviews seem to facilitate a more intersectional approach in that they allow the interviewee total freedom on what they say and provide the space to express themselves without the limits of non-free-response surveys and the like.

Methodology:

As for the hypotheses referring to voter registration increases over time as related to the Latina population, these were tested in a variety of methods to differentiate correlation and causation. In order to understand the justification behind the methodology it is important to recognize the limitations of the data. That being said, the voter registration data has racial/ethnic limits in terms of labeling and identity. The current forms have a section for ethnicity, which provides two options of Hispanic/Latino and Not Hispanic/Latino. The racial categories include African American/Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Multiracial, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, White, and Other. Multiple Latinx scholars have suggested the diverse Latinx community struggles to adopt these identities, particular first-generation immigrants. Furthermore, the North Carolina Board of Elections has not always had the ethnic section, therefore resulting in potential registered Latinx voters who are misrepresented ethnically and possibly racially as well. Moreover, the ethnic section is not mandatory to complete to submit a

voter registration form in North Carolina. While this observance is a limitation on the data, it is another example of the need for research on this community and an introductory explanation as to the contradictory scholarship on Latinx folks. Despite these limitations, voter registration is an effective number to track over time and provides a clear result for growth over time.

Initially, I ran multiple regressions to determine the exact correlation that the Latina and Latino populations had on voter registration over time. This included an OLS regression due to the continuance of the dependent variable, the Latina or Latino population, and was repeated for each population. These regression models were run twice: the former with averaged controls and the latter with median controls. The controls included socioeconomic status, derived of income and education attainment of a Bachelor's degree, the Latinx population, total population, and voting age population, of which were organized by county, in accordance with the rest of the data collection. All of the control data was pulled from the US Census Bureau's ACS 5-year estimates. Considering the 2006-2016 time frame for the data, implementing the controls by average of those ten years as well as the median of those ten years provides two different ways to analyze the data and validate the results. Next, I ran a Granger test of causality to determine, beyond correlation, the extent of the relationship between Latinas or Latinos and voter registration increase, decrease, or irrelevance. The Granger test was utilized as it is the strictest test of causality possible to determine if and how strongly a relationship exists.

Secondly, I utilized a geospatial program to create multiple maps of North Carolina during the first year of observance, the last year of observance, and the percent differences and/or growth over the ten year time span. These maps shifted per variable mentioned in each hypothesis and were analyzed by separate geographic classes of either town/city or county. The intention of these maps was to consider how for human information, particularly in relation to intersectional demographics such as ethnicity and gender, there are spatial patterns in the way humans are distributed. Displaying these patterns via maps can visualize these patterns in a way traditional statistical models cannot or may not be able to do as clearly. While a regression may be able to prove a relationship and causation between population, gender, and voter registration, these maps provide a more subtle and refined visualization of patterns otherwise potentially impossible to observe. The maps allow for a statewide all-inclusive county analysis to search for patterns by varying geographic and cultural areas in North Carolina.

As for the interview element of the project, I collected ten in-depth interviews from various community organizers in the Triangle Area (Raleigh – Durham – Chapel Hill) in North Carolina. The Triangle Area was chosen as each area has varying Latinx population, Latinx voter registration, and varying history of Latinx political representatives. Raleigh has the lowest Latinx

population and has never elected a Latinx candidate, nor has it had many Latinx candidates. Chapel Hill, on the other hand, has a moderate Latinx population, partially due to its proximity to small-town Carrboro, which has a relatively high Latinx population and Latinx elected officials. Chapel Hill has not had a Latinx representative since the 1970s, nor has it had many Latinx candidates. Durham, known once as the Black Wall Street of the south, has a thriving Black population and growing Latinx population. With its rich history of electing people of color, Durham has recently elected its first Latinx candidate to its city council. Overall, these areas are close enough in population and municipal structure to provide an equal comparison, but different enough to vary in community and narrative.

As for the individual interviews, I utilized a snowball technique to find interviewees, meaning I first met and spoke with community leaders I knew of, then asked them who they knew as a community organizer and if they could connect us. Snowballing the interviews allowed for a more organic networking process and often led to more comfortable conversations and a deeper understanding of Latinx community values and what community organizing means to Latinas. Each interview was recorded with an iPhone and written notes, but the questions were not standardized. Instead of having an ordered list of linear questions, I employed a subject map. That is, I broke my interview questions into topic areas and then asked the predetermined questions as we approached the corresponding topic. Using topic areas enabled the conversation to flow easier and more genuinely, but still provided an organized structure to keep the interviews consistent. The interviews were offered in English and Spanish and will be kept anonymous. Due to this anonymity, no specific demographic information of the interviews will be provided as to preserve privacy. The ages ranged from 20-50, all identifying as female, Latina, and a community organizer and/or activist.

Results and discussion

Some of the models utilized the change over time controls, with Table 3 demonstrating the positive relationship between the Latina population and Latinx voter registration. Table 3 provided more dramatic results, suggesting Latinas are somehow linked to Latinx political participation. The Latina population coefficient was statistically significant and positive, demonstrating a mutually increasing relationship between Latina population and voter registration over a ten-year period. A one-unit increase in Latinas results in a 0.01% increase in Latinx voter registration; more simply, an increase of one Latina person in a county leads to approximately a 0.01% increase in Latinx registered voters. Contrastingly, the Latino coefficient was negative, but also significant, showing an increase in the Latino population correlated to a decrease in Latinx

voter registration. Plots 1 and 2 visualize the results, with Plot 1 showing little relationship between overall Latinx population and Latinx voter registration. Plot 2, on the other hand, compares the Latina population with Latinx voter registration and demonstrates a positive relationship between the two.

As a result of the statistically significant positive coefficient for Latina population and Latinx voter registration per county in Table 3, a stricter test was needed to determine causality, hence the Granger test. Unlike regressions that test the correlation of a unit X on a unit Y, the Granger causality test goes both ways. That is, the statistical model tests both each unit's effects on the opposite unit to discover a more refined and stricter relationship of causation. Furthermore, the Granger causality test accounts for determining the cause prior to its effect. The results of the test suggest no relationship between the change in Latino population and the change in voter registration per county between 2006-2016. When applied to the Latina population, the coefficient remained positive and significant, establishing causation between the change in the Latina population and the change in voter registration over a decade. Similarly to Table 3, the Granger test produced a statistically significant 0.01% increase in the Latinx voter registration over time as in a strict causality relationship to increase in one Latina in the county's Latinx population. The positive coefficient represents a mutually increasing and potentially cyclic relationship between increases in the Latina population and increases in voter registration over time. The Granger test demonstrates robust support for the third hypothesis:

H3: As the number of Latinas in a Latinx countywide population increase, then the Latinx countywide population of registered will increase as a result of the Latina increase.

The second half of the quantitative analysis dealt with geospatial data to visualize some of the patterns the statistical models suggested. The maps were created using a bivariate choropleth, which enables simultaneous spatial coding of two variables, categorized from low to high. For example, Latinx voting age population may be coded as A (0-10%), B (11-20%), and C (21-30%) with Latinx percent registered to vote coded as 1 (0-10%), 2 (11-20%), and 3 (21-30%). Therefore, depending on county data, it may be labeled A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, and so on, deriving a total of nine classes per bivariate choropleth. These categories were created intrinsically via the geospatial program depending upon the variable's values. Due to each counties widely varying Latinx population, this program accounts for the most even distribution of each category per two variables.

These classes, such as A1, B2, or C3, were then given colors and various saturations to represent correlation of the variables. The color-code was based off of the lighter colors representing the lower correlations and darker colors representing the higher correlated counties.

These color-coded classes serve as the map keys and as a geospatial graph. Similar to a graph, the bottom left corner of the key, color-coded white, is the overlap of the lowest classes for each variable. The middle square, a light purple, represents a moderate correlation between the variables, with the top left square holding the highest possible correlation between the variables. The top left square and bottom right square, again similar to a graph, represent the outliers. The top left square is colored dark pink and the bottom right is colored teal.

Figure A compares the Latinx voting-age population in a county to the percent of Latinx folks registered in said county during the year of 2006 to provide data on the state's status at the time regarding the two variables. This map illustrates a high amount of the pink-hued colors, establishing a multitude of areas with a high Latinx population, but low levels of voter registration. While some of the rural areas on the borders of North Carolina are white, the color representing no to little correlation between the variables, many fall into the bottom row of classes, the lightest blue and teal colors. These colors demonstrate a correlation between low Latinx voting-age populations and high amounts of Latinx voter registration. This may be a result of the extraordinarily rural areas, having not only a low Latinx population, but a low overall population.

Figure B again compares the Latinx voting-age population in a county to the percent of Latinx folks registered in these counties, but this map visualizes the variables ten years later, in 2016. Figure B displays an increase in the darkest blue, the top right color, which represents the highest correlation between the variables. Multiple counties previously with a pink tone of high population and low voter registration transitioned to this dark blue, suggesting a certain population threshold may be connected to voter registration. The rural areas appear to have no trend when comparing snapshots the 2006 and 2016 data, presumably due to the low populations, particularly that of the Latinx community, in these areas.

The third map, Figure C, shows the change in percent Latinx voter registration by the total Latinx population increase between the years of 2006-2016. Essentially, the percentage for 2006 and 2016 is the actual count of the number of registered Latinx voters divided by the number of the Latinx voting age population, derived from native-born and naturalized citizens. Comparing this percentage of Latinx folks that are registered to the increase in Latinx voting population using nine separate classes provides visual clues to see if a large increase in the Latinx voting population will have an effect of the percent of Latinx registered voters. Figure C demonstrates the most correlation of the bivariate choropleth, with a significant amount of dark blue and light purple areas.

Figures D and E provide a gendered lens of the geospatial data, with Figure D examining how a change over ten years in the Latina population may be related to a change in Latinx voter registration. Figure E similarly compares a change in the Latino population to a change in Latinx voter registration. Building upon the trends laid out in these maps, Figure F includes a second key of either a triangle or circle shape that represents various randomized municipalities local electoral system design, being either single or multi-member systems. Figure F allows for an investigation of areas with significant Latinx voter registration growth over time and if this growth occurred most often under a certain electoral system. Correspondingly, Figure G compares areas with high correlation of Latinas and Latinx registered voters to electoral design, as does Figure H but for the Latino population. Referring back to the latter hypotheses regarding electoral system:

H4: Single-member district systems are more likely than multi-member district systems to demonstrate a decade long positive relationship between the Latina population and the number of registered Latinx voters.

It is unclear how related electoral system design at the local level may be to Latinx political participation, at least in terms of voter registration. A deeper analysis is needed to determine a relationship, as no pattern was suggested by the geospatial data as expected. Of the approximately 150 municipalities randomly collected, a significant amount was at-large systems due to North Carolina municipalities being overwhelmingly at-large, which is important to distinguish the quantity of the electoral design affecting the results. A more equal distribution of the district/ward systems is needed to effectively assess any potential trends.

While the quantitative element of the project suggests support of the theory, the interviews must be considered in order to understand why the Latina population coefficient was statistically significant and positive. I have organized the interviews into topics and then topic-areas: Actions and Challenges. The interviews provided clarity on some subjects and conflicting opinions on others. Overall, the vitality of including the Latina voice in this project cannot be understated. Without individual narratives, statistics are nothing but numbers. These interviews allow a more nuanced understanding of the *how* and *why*, rather than the *what*.

Actions: *Community/family*

One of the most common themes throughout the interviews when discussing why and how the interviewees became involved in community organizing was community and family. Beyond this, multiple interviewees explicitly emphasized the universality of community and family being an important, albeit obvious, part of the Latinx community. In considering the

diversity of the Latinx community, family values appeared as a common thread. When asked why she had run for local office, one respondent stated,

“(I was) mainly thinking how can I really support the community; it’s about giving back but more than that it’s about working together, as commerce and immigrants. Which tools do we need to be an active and positive part of the community? Everybody has different culture; we are very family-oriented, trust is important, and thinking about working with a community and what we need to know... It’s not only important to speak the language, but to know the culture.”

Even more explicitly, another activist commented that she “want(ed) to be a good mother for my daughter.” Whether it be for the community at-large or immediate community of family, both serve as deeply personal motivations for becoming involved in activism. Another young activist, in the midst of explaining how she was unexpectedly starting a non-profit that aimed to warn folks of ICE raids reiterated this theme, explaining,

“For me it’s always been about the people. How do I support my community and protect my community and make the voices of people who aren’t being heard heard? How do I do that and balance not being the one person everyone turns to?”

While this activist struggled with providing help but also providing for herself, another commented on the importance of the community in political reality. She had served as the only Latina on a town council and remembered the difficulty of maintaining community support in her journey to help her community,

“You can’t do politics alone. You have to have the voters behind you, at least in our democratic representative system, where you have eight council members and a mayor, I was one vote and I needed five. I had to have people out there watching and writing and reacting.”

She had entered politics for her community, but needed them to maintain success. The community appears to both motivate and sustain Latina activism and possibly political representation.

Actions: Representation and Gender

Of the interviewees, a couple had run for office and others had previously served in local capacities. In discussing either their experience as a representative or motivation for doing so, accountability was mentioned continually. One activist discussed representation as a next level in her community organizing, implying there was a limit to the influence of her activism and in order to provide for her community to the fullest of her ability, being a representative may be necessary. Another emphasized that the community was vital to hold representatives accountable,

“If you don’t help me hold us accountable, it won’t happen, so I had to stay really grounded and say I’m not speaking just as *redacted*, but these people out here, the ones who

elected me. And a lot of the people who were counting on me can't vote yet. I did try to represent not just the people who voted for me, but everybody that I felt needed to be represent."

When it comes to women in politics and running for office in particular, women reference this idea of accountability more than their male counterparts (Dolan, 2018). Women tend to run to serve their community and feel more linked to their community than men, who run for status and power (Dolan, 2018). Latinas reinforce this, but also seem to have a dual accountability beyond accountability to the public, but also accountability by the public. Some seem to feel held responsible to the Latinx community, as one interviewee noted,

"We need to be able to be the voices for those that can't up for themselves and for those that can we work together"

And others reiterate the gendered differences within the Latinx community:

"I've noticed that women tend to show up more than men to do work and contribute to the cause. Men, to not sound harsh, tend to show up for the "bigger" events, where they can act as though they were a part of the entire effort and initiative. However, women have been more inclined to lean in and do the dirty, 'boring,' work that people don't really want to do."

"Sadly, I think Latinas and Latinos differ greatly in regards to politics as I don't feel they are heavily involved and choose not to run, vote, or volunteer as much as other groups."

These above quotes capture the idea of community organizing being gendered, and thus Latinas in particular being the key to Latinx political participation. That being said, it is also important to keep in mind how Latinx culture may have unique gender dynamics, as one interview mentioned:

"I think that Latinos tend to run for office more, while Latinas will vote, volunteer, and help more. I think this in large part comes from the *machismo* culture that often is associated with Latinx communities. This, in essence, means that the men are in charge and women should be submissive. This can carry over to politics, where Latinos will run for office in order to stay in charge, while women will stay submissive and stay in the background."

Challenges: *Fear and mistrust*

Another theme that continued to come up throughout these interviews was the concept of trust, or lack thereof. Whether it was in reference to running for office, voting, or non-profits, trust seems to be a huge part of engaging, or disengaging, the Latinx community. Trust was noted as quintessential to more than turnout and community organizing,

"We have to meet people where they are and the way we meet them where we are is we have to understand what each race is dealing with. Speaking from the Latino community, fear is huge. The fact that some of us as parents, we just want to have food on the table and not being

able to get a driver's license? It's a huge impact in our community because we have a lot of parents where all they're trying to do is get from point A to point B, being from work to home, in order to provide for stability to their family. Not knowing where the police department stands when it comes to us: is there really a relationship, are they providing information, what are they doing in general to take care of their residents in here. So, some of the issues are safety, safety is huge, housing is huge."

Without trust, there cannot be a conversation of political participation. Registering to vote comes second to providing food for your family; before jumping to wondering why the Latinx community is not registered to vote at higher rates, it is vital to understand other priorities and basic survival needs. Others linked this mistrust to documentation,

"For a lot of our community members, there is still a barrier of language and knowledge of the system. It's not a secret that we have a lot of people without documents and they can't trust everybody."

And some noted the delicacy and complexity of this trust,

"I definitely think trust plays a lot with the Latinx population's involvement in politics. Even among family and close friend situations, trust plays a humongous role in how we operate. If someone betrays that trust, which is also very hard to come by, then it's a huge deal and can be equivalent to a slap to the face."

Challenges: *Language*

One of the most interesting results of the interviews was the conflicting opinions on the language barrier. Some scholars have suggested that the lack of Spanish has kept the Latinx community in the dark and encouraged more bilingual resources in political venues. Almost all of the interviews agreed, emphasizing the importance of language resources. They acknowledged the prevalence of Spanish in the Latinx community as another value, like community and family, which linked quite a few of the various groups together. One interviewee who had served on city council said that Spanish was one of the most important skills she brought to her community, as she was a sort of personal translator for folks who otherwise had no resources due to the language barrier.

Yet, one interviewee claimed,

"I'm sure there are people who would benefit from having a better understanding of what is going on. However, we live in a country where English is the official language and in a world that often uses English as its official language. It is difficult (time consuming and expensive) to translate everything. I'm not sure how to gauge the value of language services versus other

things. I would focus on putting money into understanding community needs not necessarily focusing on language.”

This interviewee demonstrates a key characteristic of the Latinx community in general: they are not homogenous. Cubans are not Peruvians and Mexicans are not Honduran. There is huge difference in culture, even language (re: vernacular), and value within the Latinx community. This leads us to yet another challenge: misunderstanding.

Challenges: *Misunderstanding*

While this may seem obviously linguistic, misunderstanding the Latinx community is often born out of a generalization, especially by the political science community. For example, in asking respondents to clarify race and ethnicity, some answered with Latina for both, some did not put Latina for either, with some putting Latina for race and others, for ethnicity. The point of this is that scholars are creating identity labels and definitions without asking those of that identity what they even mean. I had one interviewee exclaim she had never considered herself a Latina before coming to the United States,

“In Columbia, I was Columbian, it wasn’t until I came here I had to say I was Latina or Hispanic. I think it’s more, because now we’re seeing second-generation in our area, and it’s more that you become a Hispanic, or Latina/o when you come here. I don’t think it’s bad or good, but I think we need to continue to inform people about the diversity. A majority feels everybody is from Mexico.”

Another shared,

“Yes. I was born in El Salvador and immigrated when I was 4. My parents are immigrants also but were not educated in the U.S. I was educated in the U.S. There are two generations there. Then, my cousins who were born in the U.S. — they have a different perspective on being Latinx. Latinx is NOT synonymous with immigrant. All communities and generations bring rich perspectives.”

One important takeaway from these quotes is that in order to understand identity within the Latinx community, we must first listen before we label. Without listening to what Latinas connote with Latinx and Hispanic, political scientists will not be able to accurately understand the community in general, let alone when it comes to political participation. One interviewee questioned the use of Latinx in general,

“Latin America is a very large geographic region with 33 countries. I think it is a mistake to assume that the entire community feels one-way-or-another about anything.”

Conclusion and Future Intentions

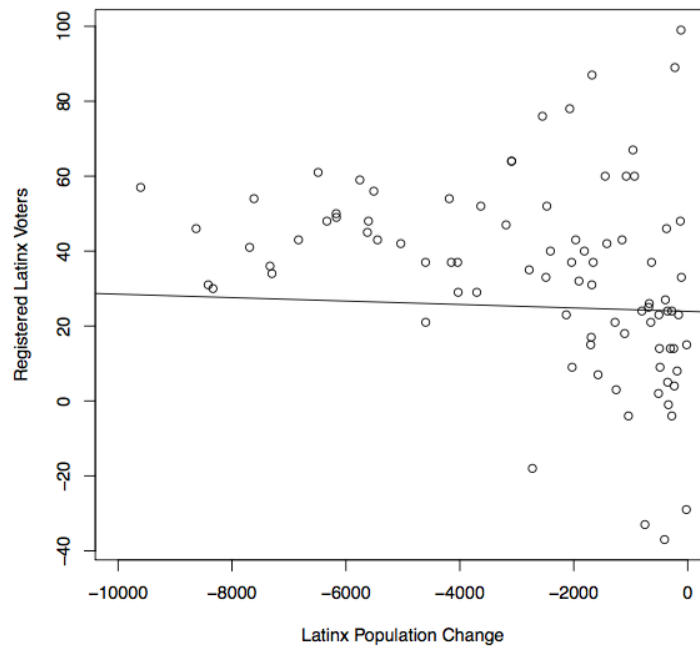
Regression tests, the Granger test, and geospatial patterns suggested strong support for the theory of Latinas being key to Latinx political participation. The constant finding of an increase in the Latina population leading to an increase in Latinx voter registration is notable. Latinas appear to be both a necessary and sufficient condition to Latinx voter registration. Furthermore, the lack of a relationship between the Latino population and voter registration calls for a reevaluation of prior theories that suggest a population threshold is needed for political participation within various racial and ethnic groups. While electoral system appears to be unrelated, an analysis with a more balanced dataset and controls for population density would result in a more accurate evaluation of the relationship or lack thereof between the Latinx community and local electoral systems.

The interviews helped to provide a more clear picture into why these numbers are not only statistically significant, but culturally and politically significant as well. The interviews recognized potential actions and the corresponding motivations that led to Latina community organizing and Latinx political participation, as well as what continues to be challenging about these experiences. These findings suggest certain community members are more important than others in affecting political participation and in terms of source cues, as possibly connected to community organizing and the importance of community, as the interviewees demonstrated.

The interviews also strengthen the notion that listening to the Latinx community is a vital element of thorough research on the Latinx community. Whether it be due to the size, scope, documentation, language, none of the above, or a combination of the above, without listening to the people of a community, it is impossible to accurately assess their political participation. Moving forward, scholars should be considerate of giving a voice to the Latinx community, especially Latinas.

Appendix:

Plot 1:



Plot 2:

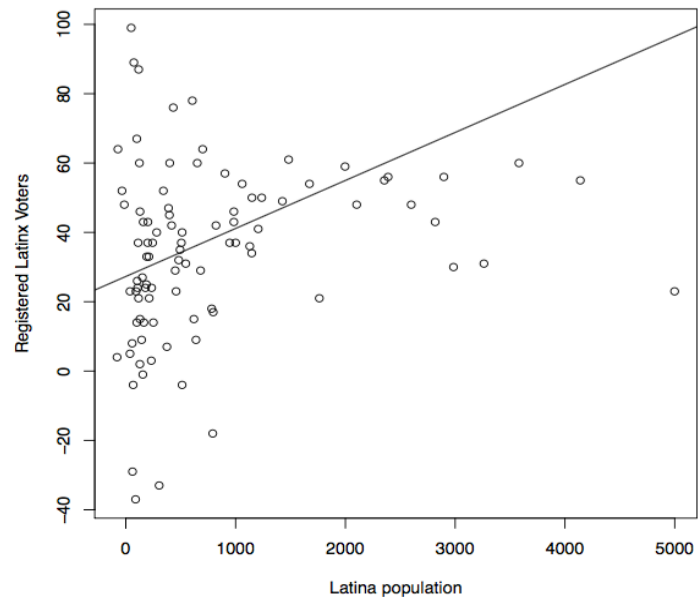


Table 3: Change in Latinx Voter Registration, 2006-2016

<i>Dependent variable: Change in Latinx Voter Registration, 2006-2016</i>	
	Percent_Diff100
Latina Population Change	0.010*** (0.003)
Latino Population Change	-0.013*** (0.005)
Constant	34.509*** (2.616)
Observations	100
R ²	0.106
Adjusted R ²	0.087
Residual Std. Error	23.643 (df = 97)
F Statistic	5.723*** (df = 2; 97)
<i>Note:</i> *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Figure A

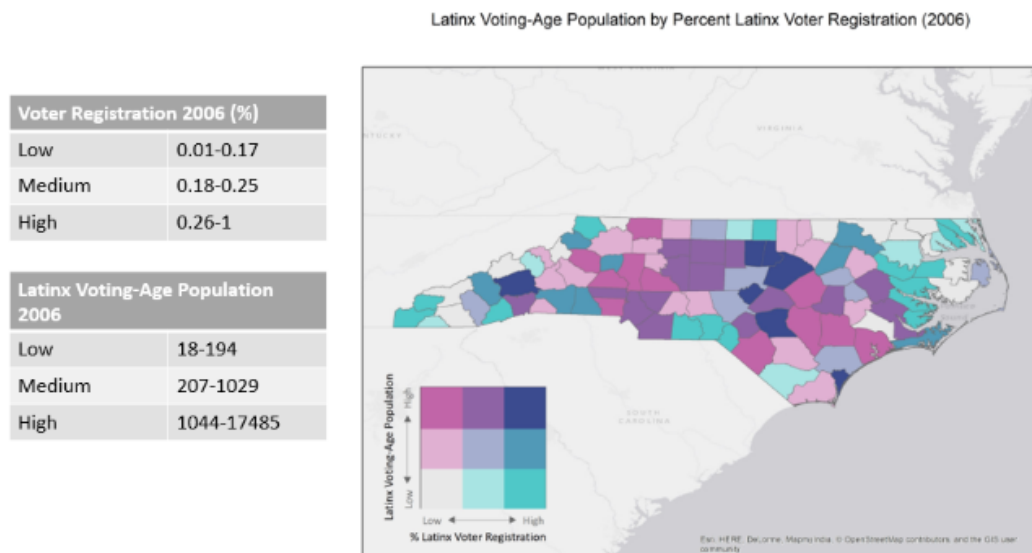


Figure B

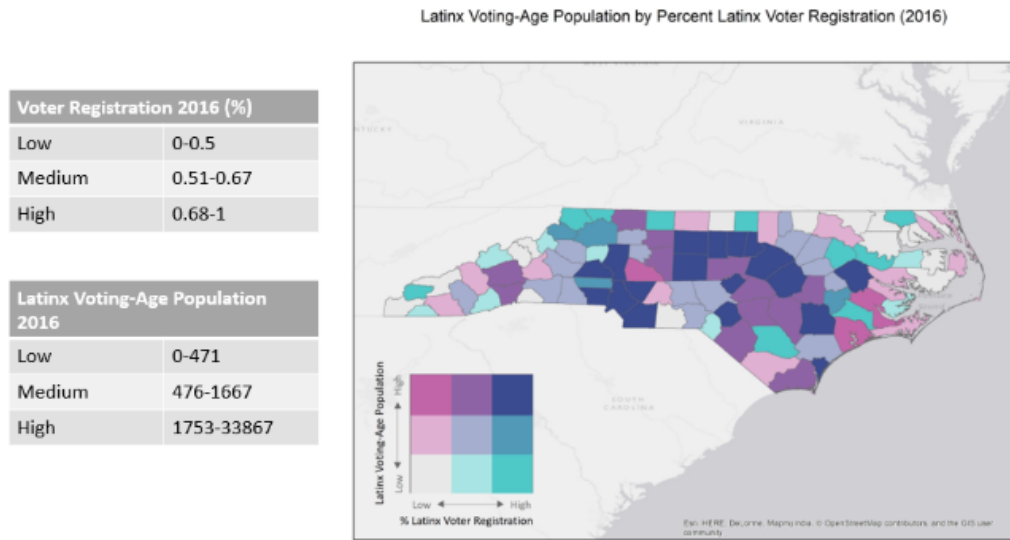


Figure C

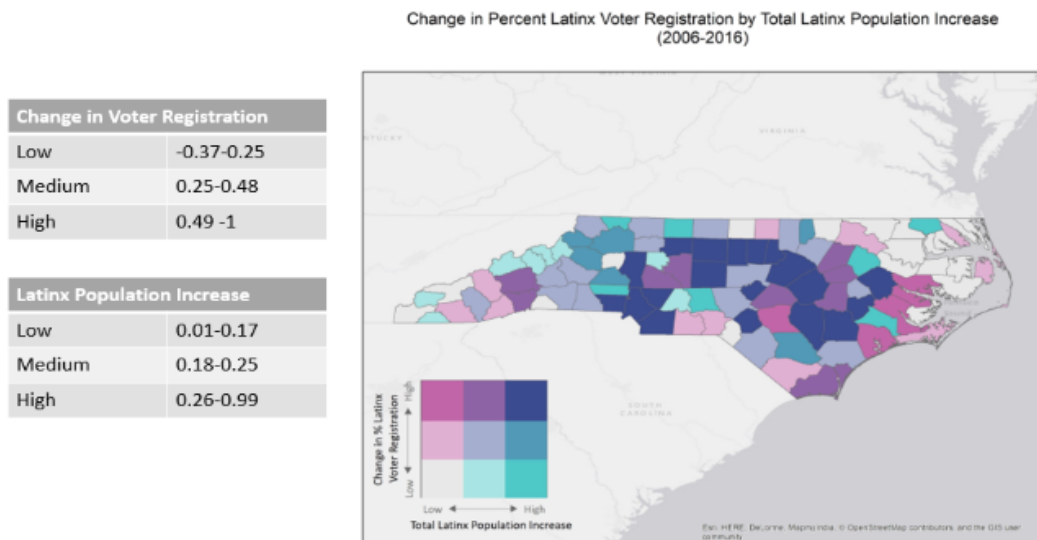


Figure D

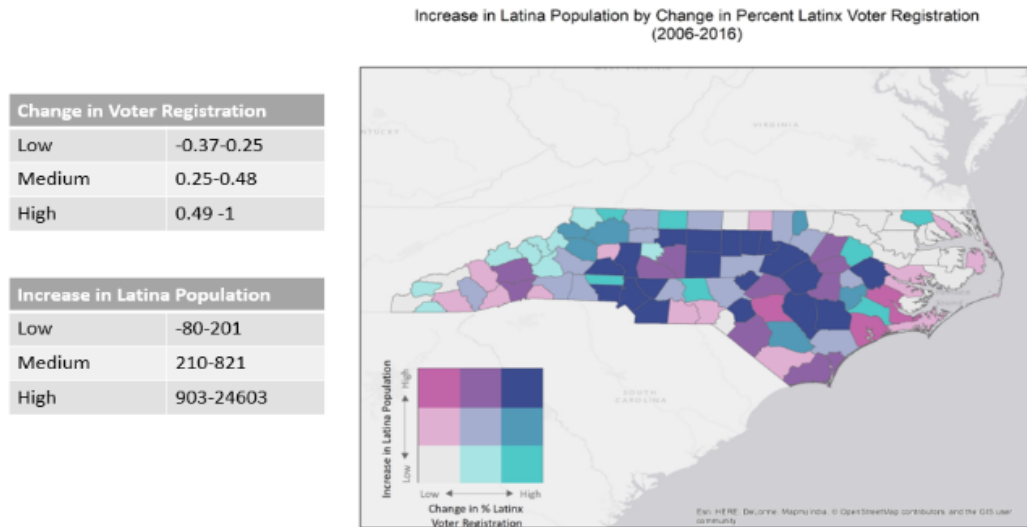


Figure E

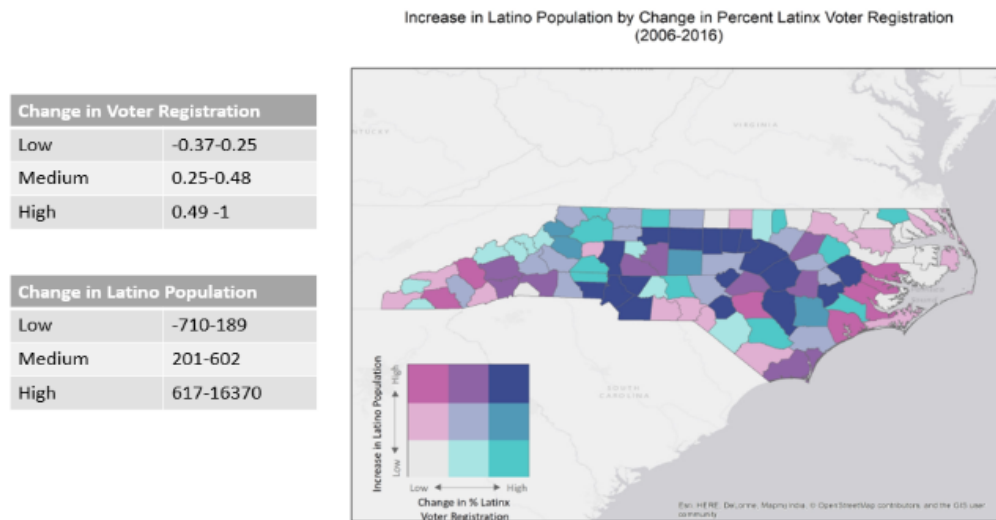


Figure F

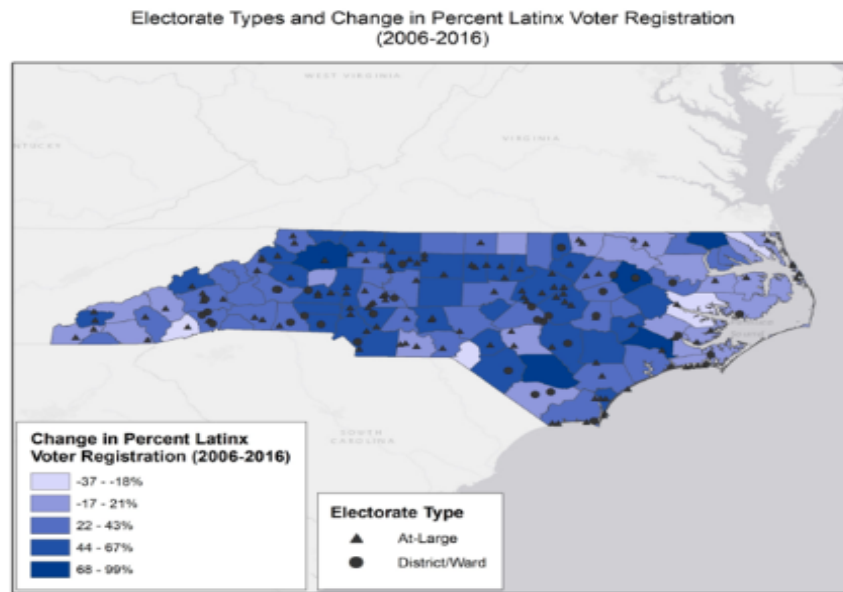


Figure G

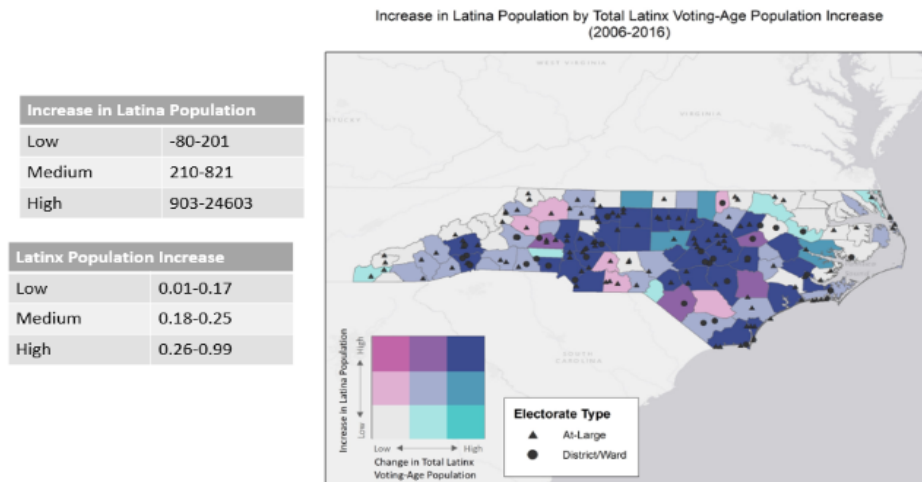
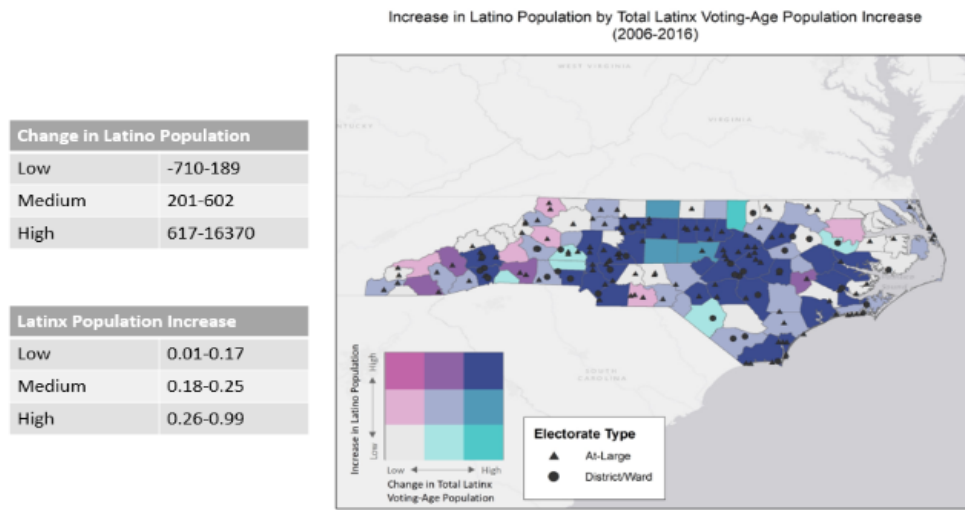


Figure H



Citations

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